

RJCL Community Conversations Initiative

WHAT IS IT AND WHY DID THE RJCL EMBARK ON IT?

The RJCL Mission

❖ **The mission of the RJCL is to serve every sector of the Roe Jan community (Ancram, Copake and Hillsdale) by inspiring life-long learning and curiosity, advancing knowledge and understanding, strengthening the vitality of the Roe Jan community and securing the library's stability for generations to come.**

Why engage the community in conversation?

- ❖ We all need to better understand:
 - People's **aspirations** and **concerns**
 - How people **think and talk** about community issues
 - **Changes** required to reach aspirations
 - What people believe they can **achieve** and who they **trust** to take action to achieve those aspirations

Conversations generate public knowledge

- ❖ **Roots work and decisions in what matters to people**
- ❖ **Identifies key issues and their connections in language that people use**
- ❖ **Uncovers a sense of common purpose**
- ❖ **Enables one to set realistic goals**
- ❖ **Informs choices so that work is more relevant and has greater impact**

Community Conversation process is important because:

❖ Participants feel:

- Listened to
- Their views / expertise are valued
- A sense of shared purpose
- Empowered to take small steps toward creating the change they want for their community

Community Conversations

Conducted 6 Community Conversations

❖ Where were the conversations held? How many people attended?

- RJCL (7 Town Officials)
- Taconic Hills High School (12)
- Ancram Firehouse (7)
- Hillsdale Firehouse (15)
- Copake Firehouse (13)
- Our Lady of Hope Church (15)

❖ Who attended?

- Mix of Ancram, Copake and Hillsdale residents
- Mix of full-time residents (long-time and new), weekenders, TB board members, business owners, retirees, educators
- Mostly 50+ or older

❖ Also conducted 4 one-on-one conversations with high school students

How did we engage the participants in the conversations?

Questions asked...

- 1. What kind of community do you want to live in?**
- 2. What are the 2-3 most important issues when it comes to the community?**
- 3. What concerns do you have about this / these issues? Why?**
- 4. How do the issues we're discussing affect you personally?**
- 5. When you think about these things, how do you feel about what's going on?**

Questions asked...cont.

6. What do you think is keeping us from making the progress we want?
7. When you think about what we've talked about, what are the kind of things that could be done that would make a difference?
8. Thinking back over the conversation, what groups or individuals would you trust to take action on these things?
9. If we came back together in 6 months or a year, what might you see that would tell you that the things we talked about today were starting to happen?

What did we learn from the Community Conversations?

Aspirations...what do people want?

- ❖ **A scenic, rural community**
- ❖ **A community with a sense of connection and community spirit**
 - **One where people care for one another, are engaged and volunteer to support and care for the community**

What are people's MAIN concerns?

1. Connections: People want connections with others in the community... but it's harder to achieve those connections than it used to be, because....

- Rural character makes connecting difficult
- Divisions between long-time and new residents as well as weekenders vs. full-time residents complicate making connections
- Economic issues also contribute to these divisions

What are people's MAIN concerns?

2. Communication: people don't feel like they always know what is going on or where to get information

“I didn't know Hillsdale / Ancram / Copake was doing / involved in that!”

What are people's MAIN concerns?

3. Economic challenges:

- Lack of good paying jobs / skills to fill jobs
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of public transportation

“There is a struggling underclass here”

What are their SPECIFIC concerns?

1. Impact of short-term rentals (AirBnB) on housing market and sense of community

- Lack of neighbors, removal of affordable housing and long-term rental property from the market
- *Paradox – also provides income to homeowners / businesses*

2. Lack of broadband access impacts ability to connect with others, get information, student learning and economic opportunity

3. Lack of good paying jobs as well as lack of well trained tradespeople

What are their SPECIFIC concerns – cont?

- 4. Lack of places for people to come together; disappearance of former meeting places**
- 5. Lack of businesses that meet basic needs, not just tourist / weekender needs**
- 6. Lack of public transit negatively impacts seniors and young working people**
- 7. Presence of many dilapidated buildings**

What actions would make a difference?

- 1. Having more places / events for diverse groups of people to come together**
- 2. Developing a local newsletter / website listing services, events, etc., for the RJ area**
- 3. Working with schools and community colleges to provide vocational training; helping students develop skills for jobs in the area**
- 4. Encouraging business development that caters to changing demographics of the area (seniors, second homeowners, etc.)**

Who do participants trust to act?

❖ Not the Town Boards

“It should be the Town Boards, but that will never happen. They are too busy managing their own fiefdoms.”

❖ Some committees / organizations such as Hillsdale’s Safe at Home Committee, Ancram’s Neighbors Helping Neighbors, Copake Grange

❖ The Roe Jan Community Library

What else did we hear?

“We are a maturing community struggling with identity. A mature community may be in conflict with economic development.”

“Money is here....it comes here every weekend.”

“Is the lack of jobs and affordable housing the price we must pay for beautiful countryside?”

“Second home owners are the major industry here”

“The Copake Grange is phenomenal!”

“Some weekenders just don’t want to be involved. But, they pay hefty taxes and don’t require services paid for by taxes. Plus they support local businesses.”

What else did we hear – cont?

“Industry will go to places where people can do the work. But the average kid in this town isn’t getting the training.”

“Aging people need services”

“Them vs. Us is real...I’ve been coming here for 57 years and I’m still not a ‘local’”

“What connects the towns other than the library?”

“We need a place that brings people together. You have to look for accidental / incidental places to meet people”

“People on the Rail Trail say...You live here? This is paradise!”

Next Steps

- ❖ **Present finding to RJCL Trustees (done)**
- ❖ **Present findings and general next steps to:**
 - ❖ Community Conversation participants
 - ❖ Ancram, Copake and Hillsdale Town Boards
 - ❖ School boards and elected officials
 - ❖ The Roe Jan Community

Next Steps cont...

- ❖ **Use findings to inform the RJCL 5 Year Strategic Plan with emphasis on :**
 - ❖ Fostering connections between RJ area residents
 - ❖ Improving communication among RJ area residents
 - ❖ Facilitating ongoing dialogue with RJ residents about their economic concerns

Questions? Comments?